

with low-dielectric-constant ("low-k") materials ... ' and replace therefore, in accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(b)(1)(ii), the following:

1 Recently, there has been great interest to replace SiO<sub>2</sub> with low-dielectric-constant ("low-k") materials having dielectric constants lower than silicon oxide (e.g., about 3.9) as the ILD in interconnect structures. It is desirable to employ low-k materials as insulators in IC interconnect because these low-k materials reduce the interconnect capacitance. Accordingly, these low-k materials increase the signal propagation speed while reducing cross-talk noise and power dissipation in the interconnect.

In accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(b)(1)(iii), please find attached to this response a separate marked up copy of the immediately preceding replacement paragraph. The attached page is captioned "Version with markings to show changes made".

#### IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend claim 21 by replacement with the following rewritten claim, in accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(c)(1)(i), therefore:

21. (amended) The interconnect of claim 16, wherein the protective layer includes silicon carbide.

In accordance with 37 CFR § 1.121(c)(1)(ii), please find attached to this response a separate marked up copy of the immediately preceding rewritten claim. The attached page is captioned "Version with markings to show changes made".

Please add the following new claim:

34. (New) An interconnect comprising:

(a) a plurality of metal lines formed from a first metal layer, said metal lines having gaps therebetween;